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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relation of parenting style and parents' personality to children's Type A behavior pattern. Teachers rated 38 second- through fifth-grade children on the Matthews Youth Test for Health (MYTH), which was used to measure children's Type A behavior. Two subscale scores, leadership-competitiveness and impatience-aggression, were derived from the MYTH ratings. Parents of 19 of the children completed 7 scales which measured family cohesiveness and parents' Type A personality, Type A attitudes, anger, and perceptions of their child's distractibility and ego resilience. Results indicated that: (1) Type A children were perceived by their parents as having ego resilience; (2) parental Type A personality was not associated with children's MYTH scores; (3) fathers' Type A personality was negatively correlated with children's leadership subscale score; and (4) parents' anger was not associated with children's MYTH scores. These results were unexpected. Other results indicated that family cohesiveness was associated with leadership and children's MYTH scores were associated with family Type A behavior. Children's leadership was associated with parental Type A behavior and attitudes. Mothers' traits and behaviors predicted children's Type A profile more strongly than did fathers'. A list of 10 references is included. (BC)

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Family Correlates of Children's Type A Behavior

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Family Correlates of Children's Type A Behavior

The Type A behavior pattern (TABP) construct has been implicated in the etiology of coronary disease. TABP has been defined as being composed of time urgency, aggressiveness, competitiveness, and free-floating hostility (Friedman & Rosenman, 1974). Research directed at studying the genesis of TABP in children (e.g., Matthews & Angulo, 1980) has identified competitiveness/leadership and impatience/aggression as two important dimensions.

Do parenting styles or parental personalities affect the acquisition of Type A behavior? Little is known about the families of Type A children (however see Bortner, Rosenman, & Friedman, 1970; Matthews & Krantz, 1976; Matthews, Stoney, Rakaczky, & Jamison, 1986). The present research attempted to shed light on the question of whether parental characteristics are correlated with child Type A behaviors.

Predictions. It was predicted that children and parents would have similar Type A scores. Family adaptability and cohesiveness was expected to be negatively correlated with children's Type A scores. It was also expected that the parents who rate themselves high in anger-in and/or anger-out would have Type A children, since these traits have been associated with Type A status. Also, parents who behave in a Type A fashion within the family (e.g., have high expectations for the child's performance) or possess general Type A attitudes and fears (e.g., fear of being treated unfairly) were expected to have children with high Type A scores. Type A children were expected to be rated as high in distractibility and ego-undercontrol, and low in adaptability and ego-resilience.

Method

Measures. Teachers' ratings of 38 children (2nd-5th grade) were obtained during the spring of 1989 for Matthews' (Matthews & Angulo, 1980) MYTH test of children's Type A behavior. During the summer, packets of questionnaires were sent to the parents. Parents of 19 children completed seven scales:

1) the Family Adaptibility and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES III; Olson, Portner, & Lavee, 1985) which measured degree of family cohesiveness and family adaptability,

2) the Jenkins Activity Scale (JAS; Jenkins, Zyzanski, & Rosenman, 1967) which yielded a Type A score for each parent,

3) the Anger Expression Scale (AES; Spielberger et al., 1985) which measured parental anger-in, anger-out, and calmness,

4) the Family Environment Characteristics Scale (FECS; constructed from items taken from Matteson, Ivancevich, & Gamble, 1987) which assessed familial Type A characteristics (e.g., "I am unhappy when my child fails to meet the standards set for him or her."),

5) the Parenting Stress Index (Abidin, 1983), which measured the parents' perceptions

of the child's distractibility and lack of adaptability,

6) the Ego-Resilience Measure (Block, 1961), which measured the parents' perceptions of the child's ego-resilience and ego-undercontrol, and

7) the Attitudes Toward Life Scale (Matteson et al., 1987), which measured Type A attitudes and fears.

Subjects. Parents of 13 girls and 6 boys provided data. The sample included white, middle-class families. Thirteen fathers and 18 mothers responded; for seven children, single parents gave data.

Results

Correlations were computed between the parental variables listed above and the child's scores on the MYTH. Two subscale scores for the MYTH were derived also: a leadership/competitiveness factor and an impatience/aggression factor. The significant correlations for fathers and mothers separately are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Insert Tables 1 & 2 here

Surprisingly, fathers' JAS Type A scores were negatively associated with their children's MYTH Type A scores. However, as expected, fathers' Type A attitudes were associated with children's MYTH scores, at least for the first subscale. Another surprising result was that fathers' ratings of their children's ego-resilience were positively associated with both MYTH subscales.

This last surprising finding was supported in the mothers' data. Also surprising was that children's impatience/aggression scores were negatively correlated with lack of adaptability and anger-out.

On the other hand, it made sense that family cohesiveness was positively associated with leadership/competitiveness scores. Also, mothers' ratings of Family Type A behavior and Type A fears were positively correlated with MYTH scores.

Finally, a discriminant analysis was performed to determine if these variables would correctly classify subjects into high and low Type A groups. The range of overall MYTH scores among the 19 subjects was approximately normal, 28 to 62, s.d. = 9.40. A median split was used to create a high MYTH group (M = 42.6, s.d. = 7.82) and a low MYTH group (M = 57.0, s.d. = 3.16). A significant canonical discriminant function was obtained (Wilk's lambda = .002, df = 10, $p < .001$) in which all subjects were correctly classified

into the two groups. The predictors were virtually identical to those found for the correlations.

Discussion

It is acknowledged that the present sample is small. However, since this type of data is very difficult to obtain and since many of the findings make sense, we wish to argue that these obtained relationships are useful in pointing out tentative directions for larger scale studies on this topic.

Several findings are puzzling and deserve attention in future research. For example, Type A children were not described by their parents as high in distractibility and ego-undercontrol and low in adaptability and ego-resilience. Rather, Type A children were perceived by their parents as possessing high ego-resilience.

Another unpredicted result was that parental JAS scores were not positively associated with children's MYTH scores. Fathers' JAS scores were significantly but negatively correlated with leadership/competitiveness scores.

Anger expression was not associated with MYTH scores as predicted. The only finding here was that children's impatience/aggression scores were negatively associated with maternal anger-out expression.

The chief expected results were that: 1) family cohesiveness was associated with competitiveness/leadership, 2) children's Type A scores were associated with Family Type A behavior, and 3) children's competitiveness/leadership was associated with parental Type A attitudes and fears.

Taken altogether, these findings present an interesting picture. First, the child's version of the Type A personality seems to have positive characteristics, ego-resilience most principally. Children's Type A behavior was not associated with ego-undercontrol, distractibility, or lack of adaptability, at least as perceived by the parents.

Parental expression of anger was not associated with children's Type A traits, nor were parental Type A scores. However, parental family Type A behaviors and parental attitudes and beliefs were significantly associated with children's Type A scores. It is possible that parents answered in a more socially desirable fashion on the anger and Type A measures.

Mothers' traits and behaviors predicted children's Type A profile more strongly than fathers'. However, the present data had an overrepresentation of daughters and mothers so it

was not possible to determine if father-child variables are equally important as the mother-child variables identified above.

Father-son and mother-daughter relationships are typically more powerful than cross-sex relations, but the present sample is not adequate for examining the relative power of these types of parent-child relations. Future research should include larger samples and more even distributions of male and female children and parents in order to test this hypothesis and determine whether the trends noted here are robust.

It is not known whether this transgenerational similarity is caused by temperamental similarities or by social learning. Future research should be directed at determining whether temperamental differences evident in the months after birth lead to children's Type A behavior, and whether these temperamental traits are genetically passed from parent to child. Modeling probably also occurs. In-home observations of parent-child interactions at different ages are needed.

The issue of whether transgenerational transmission of Type A traits occurs continues to be important. These data suggest that certain pathways may occur between parent and child, but further work is needed to replicate the connections.

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Table 1

Fathers' Traits Correlated with Children's Type A Scores

	Children's Type A Scores		
	Overall MYTH	Leader/Compet	Impat/Agg
Ego-resil.[1]	.57*	.53*	.57*
JAS Score[2]	-.57*	-.63**	NS
Type A Atts[3]	.43*	.49*	NS

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ [1]Ego-resilience (Block) of child as rated by father. [2]Father's Type A score on the Jenkins Activity Survey. [3]Type A attitudes (Matteson et al.) held by father.

Table 2

Mothers' Traits Correlated with Children's Type A Scores

	Children's Type A Scores		
	Overall MYTH	Leader/Compet	Impat/Agg
Family cohes.[1]	.46*	.51*	NS
Ego-resil.[2]	.65**	.60*	.63*
Lack of Adapt.[3]	NS	NS	-.41*
Family Type A[4]	.57*	.55*	.51*
Anger-out[5]	-.39*	NS	-.52*
Type A Fears[6]	.45*	.52*	NS

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ [1]Family cohesiveness as rated by mother on FACES III. [2]Ego-resilience (Block) of child as rated by mother. [3]Lack of adaptability of the child as rated by mother on the Parenting Stress Index. [4]Family Type A behaviors (Matteson et al.) as rated by mother. [5]Anger expressed outward (Spielberger et al.) of mother rated by mother. [6]Type A Fears (Matteson et al.) of mother rated by mother.